



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the lunch with the American Chamber of Commerce
and American Club of Paris**

UNESCO, 14 March 2011

Excellency Ambassador David Killion, Permanent Delegate of the United States to
UNESCO,

Ms Portia Eltvedt, President of the American Club of Paris,

Ms Marina Niforios, Managing Director of the American Chamber of Commerce,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be with you today. I thank you for this invitation to share a
few words with you.

The American Club of Paris and the American Chamber of Commerce are both
venerable institutions. The Chamber of Commerce was born in 1894, while the Club
reaches back to the days of the American War of Independence.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is a bit
younger!

UNESCO was created in 1945 to build peace through cooperation in education,
science, culture, communication and information.

UNESCO's Constitution declares that if wars start in the minds of men and women,
then it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be built.

There are American and British pens behind this phrase, drafted by the American
poet and Librarian of Congress, Archibald Macleish and the United Kingdom Prime
Minister Clement Atlee. This is the "special relationship" in action!

This idea was inspiring in 1945, in a world left destroyed by a devastating war. It remains inspiring today – in a world where the pace of change is accelerating and sometimes bewildering.

Globalization is opening fabulous new opportunities for exchange and cooperation.

It is also giving rise to new challenges.

Peoples and cultures do not all weigh the same in its scales. We are seeing new tensions arise between communities, within societies. We are facing increasing challenges that transcend borders.

UNESCO works to enhance the capacity of States and societies to respond to the pressures of change and to make the most of the opportunities it offers.

Our mandate is founded on values.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the starting point for our action and the measure of its success.

I see UNESCO's role today in bridging the gaps that exist in global governance and that are vital for our common future.

UNESCO does not deliver development aid, but crafts the conditions for development.

UNESCO does not keep the peace, but works to make it last.

UNESCO does not provide hardware, but some of the vital software for peace and development.

What does this mean in practice?

Let me give you three examples to illustrate.

UNESCO is the only UN agency with a clear mandate to promote and protect the free flow of information and freedom of expression.

In 2009, at least 77 journalists and support staff were killed worldwide while doing their job.

UNESCO stands up for every journalist attacked or killed.

UNESCO's Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize will be attributed this year to the imprisoned Iranian journalist Ahmad Zeidabadi.

We are developing the legal frameworks necessary for free speech in Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

In Zimbabwe, we underpin the new Media Commission, tasked to develop an enabling environment for the media.

UNESCO has been an especially outspoken during recent developments in North Africa and the Middle East.

I have spoken out publicly against violations of freedom of expression and information and protested against violence against journalists.

We started immediately to work with transitional authorities in Tunisia and Egypt to strengthen media freedoms through sector-wide reform, support to journalism education, and pre-electoral assistance.

To continue with recent events, UNESCO is a global leader in tsunami warning.

When the earthquake occurred off the coast of Japan on 11 March at 5.46 GMT, a Tsunami alert was issued three minutes later -- thanks to the Pacific Tsunami Warning System, set up by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission.

UNESCO is creating similar systems for the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean and the seas around Europe.

The catastrophe in Japan showed the importance of information speed and integrity in such crises.

On 23 March, we organized a simulated tsunami alert in the Caribbean. The test involved thirty three countries and highlighted shortfalls to be addressed.

UNESCO's angle is wider than risk reduction.

It includes a leading international role in oceans observation. It involves the transfer of technology to developing countries for infrastructure on sea level monitoring.

In Pakistan, we are supporting the creation of a comprehensive disaster risk management policy.

We are supporting coastal management in West and East Africa.

Education is vital.

It is the best way to develop new ways of thinking and to forge new behaviours.

Climate change education lies at the heart of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), which UNESCO leads.

My last example concerns our work in education.

Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, was here last November, and gave an inspiring speech on his vision of education. He called it the "great equalizer" and the "new game changer driving economic growth."

Education is, indeed, an accelerator for achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals.

It is also a force for equity – especially gender equality.

A woman's level of education impacts not only on her economic and social position, but also on her children's nutrition, health and education. The impact is communitywide.

Education is excellent preventive medicine -- vital for combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Fundamentally, education is about values.

It is about fostering respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights.

UNESCO is leading the global campaign to reach the Education for All goals by 2015.

Considerable progress has been made, including in many poor countries. But the world is not on track.

67 million children were out of school in 2008. In sub-Saharan Africa, 10 million children drop out of primary school every year. Some 796 million adults lack basic literacy skills -- two-thirds of these are women. Far too many students still leave school with minimal skills.

The economic crisis is taking a toll on education budgets.

At the same time, development assistance to basic education has stagnated since 2008. Aid to sub-Saharan Africa has fallen.

These problems are exacerbated in areas affected by conflict.

This is the headline message of UNESCO's 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report -- our annual benchmark report.

Our key message is clear. A basic quality education is an essential human right. It is also a motor for economic success. Investing in education lays the foundations for sustainable development.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

This brings me to my last point.

The challenges we face today call for innovative international cooperation.

Cooperation between the public and private sectors is vital here.

UNESCO has strong experience of such cooperation.

We are running a Brain Gain Initiative with Hewlett Packard to strengthen higher education institutions in Africa and the Arab region.

We are partners with Nokia to promote mobile learning and the use of mobile technologies.

We are working with Cisco, Intel and Microsoft to develop an Information and Communication Technology Competency Framework for Teachers. We are partners also in our work to deliver a 'Next Generation of Teachers' for the Asia-Pacific region.

Partnerships should be creative in form and substance. We can do more, for instance, with new technologies to train teachers, to enhance learning outcomes, and to reach marginalised groups.

For instance, the Broadband Commission for Development that UNESCO launched last year with the International Telecommunication Union is a great example.

The Commission is co-chaired by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Mr Carlos Slim Helú, Chairman of Grupo Carso. Other commissioners include highlevel officials from Governments, parliaments and international organisations, along with private sector leaders as well as world artists. All have come together to support global broadband roll-out for inclusive education.

This is a laboratory for innovation. It is a model to consider for other areas.

UNESCO will launch next month a new initiative on girls' education. Mobilizing major private sector companies, this will focus on sector-wide policy support, on non-formal education and on the education of adult women.

All of this requires a UNESCO that is effective and transparent.

This is why I am so determined to create an Organization that is sharper, more forward-looking and more operational. This imperative is driving the reform

underway in all aspects of the Organization, starting with creating a new culture of ethics.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are all in this together – all peoples, all States, the private and the public sectors alike.

I am reminded here of the words of Ben Franklin which ring true, as they do on so many other subjects:

“All who think cannot but see there is a sanction like that of religion which binds us in partnership in the serious work of the world.”

Humanity is bound by such a partnership, indeed.

But we need to think about it, to see it and to build on it.

This is UNESCO's mission. It is a core task for the 21st century.